

County supervisors have mishandled Cadiz project

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Regarding San Bernardino County increasing its legal fund to fight lawsuits over the Cadiz water project in Mojave, Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Janice Rutherford states, "We have scientists on all sides of the issue that have different views about how Cadiz's plans are going to affect the groundwater."

Well, no, Chairwoman, there are only two sides: that of Cadiz and the Santa Margarita Water District (SMWD) in Orange County (the former of which stands to make millions off the water sales), and that of everyone else, including independent scientists of the United States Geological Survey and the National Parks Service who have contested virtually every assertion made by the scientists hired by Cadiz and SMWD.

A prudent individual would be wise to question the motives of a company poised to make millions off a project on which it is seeking approval, but perhaps the tens of thousands that Cadiz has made in campaign contributions to some county supervisors has clouded their judgment.

Rutherford also states that the county will be "closely monitoring the project."

In May 2012, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors adopted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in which they abdicated their "lead agency" rights to SMWD and also exempted the Cadiz water project from the San Bernardino Groundwater Management Ordinance. In doing so they also redefined the "annual overdraft" clause of the ordinance in which the county checks that the extraction of groundwater does not exceed the natural replenishment of such groundwater, from a yearly basis to a 10-year average. This means that the Cadiz project could operate with continual deficits (overdrafts) for at least a decade, creating an effective barrier to enforcement against harm to the aquifer. This is Rutherford's idea of "closely monitoring the project"?

The Board of Supervisors, whether through greed or ineptitude, has done the citizens of San Bernardino County a disservice in its handling of the Cadiz water project -- and for this we will pay dearly.

-- Paul Clement, Upland